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Hoopa Valley Tribe Marches To Restore The Trinity

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Over 100 members of the Hoopa Valley Tribe and supporters marched on the offices of the Northern California Power Agency in Roseville on March 15 to ask the agency to withdraw from the lawsuit blocking Trinity River restoration.

The group, holding colorful signs, big salmon puppets, and a huge fisherman puppet, surprised representatives of the NCPA and local residents in a city unused to protests. Many drivers going by the offices on Cirby Avenue honked in support of the river advocates as the protesters shouted, "Hey-Hey, Ho-Ho, the lawsuit has got to go," "Don't shake - don't shiver, we are here to save the river," "Please hear our wish, don't kill the fish."

Heather Campbell, a Hoopa Tribal member who helped hold the fisherman puppet up with her two children, explained the importance of the river to her culture. "The river is part of our heritage and culture and we need it to survive," she stated. "I fish hook and line with spinners for steelhead and salmon for fun, but my family fishes for sustenance. Our tribe has survived on fish since time immemorial."

As tribal members marched peacefully and beat a ceremonial drum on the sidewalk outside of the office, Hoopa Valley Tribal Chairman Clifford Lyle Marshall and members of the Tribal Council presented a "peace offering" of a basket of smoked salmon to representatives of the NCPA.

"The energy crisis was created by manipulation of the market in Texas, not in California, and it's time to see that the lawsuit does not have any merit," said Marshall as he presented the basket to John Fistolera, and Jane Serrincinoe, NCPA representatives. "We want the NCPA to do the right thing for the right reasons and to preserve the river for our kids and their children."

Marshall emphasized how the Trinity restoration plan - the Record of Decision (ROD) signed by then Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt - was the culmination of over 20 years of hard work by the Hoopa Tribe and other California communities.

"People must realize that the Trinity is something worth saving not only for the Indian people but for all Californians," said Marshall. "We invite you to spend time on the river rafting or fishing. If you saw the river even once, you'll understand why we love it so much and why it's so important to protect it."

The Hoopa Tribe was joined by members of the Yurok Tribe and representatives of Friends of the River, International Rivers Network, United Anglers, Friends of the Eel River and Save the American River Association in protesting the continued participation of the agency as partners in the lawsuit with Westlands Water District, the poster boy of unsustainable agribusiness.

The lawsuit blocks the Record of Decision, which provides 47 percent of the river's flows to fish and the other 53 percent to agricultural and power users. Prior to the ROD, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation diverted up to 90 percent of the river, much of it to the unsustainable corporate farms in the Westlands Water District of the San Joaquin Valley.

After the peace offering, the NCPA representatives invited them into the office. Nothing was resolved, with Fistolera and Jane Serrincinoe reiterating their agency's position.

"We support river restoration," said Fistolera, NCPA's legislative director. "The resource portfolio of NCPA members is 75 percent renewable energy. We think that the Environmental Impact Statement coming out (as a result of the lawsuit) will address your concerns and our concerns. We commit to working with the Hoopa on a solution that restores the fish and considers the need for reliable electrical generation."

"The ROD was made on only one basis - flow," added Serrincinoe, who claimed that higher flows could in fact impede restoration efforts by washing gravel out of some alluvial areas.

However, Mike Orcutt, fisheries program director of the tribe, emphasized that the agency was just rehashing concepts that have already been proven wrong by fishery scientists.

"They are holding onto bygone ideas, such as the discredited SMUD Alternative and the idea that higher flows can damage a river," he said. "But the science is behind the ROD. NCPA is just talking about procedural violations of the ESA to continue the litigation."

Marshall dismissed the concept that the ROD would cost power customers a substantial amount of power or money. The cost of implementing the ROD would only be \$.25 per month or \$3.00 per year, based on a study by Environmental Defense.

Friends of the River (FOR), a statewide river advocacy group, helped organize the event with the tribe to mark the annual International Day of Action Against Dams on March 15. River activists in 18 countries, including many indigenous activists, held 38 separate events to support healthy, free-flowing rivers.

"Friends of the River is here to support the struggle of the Hoopa Tribe," said Craig Tucker, FOR Outreach Director. "The Trinity was once one of the west's most productive salmon fisheries. Today it is but a shadow of its former self, hosting only 12% of its historic population of salmon. NCPA will still get power from the project even if the river is restored."

Local recreational anglers also supported the Hoopa Tribe. Bill Hagopian, spokesman for the Granite Bay Flycasters, said, "The City of Roseville needs to be more environmentally sensitive. For the cost of a cup of coffee annually, we can help the Hoopa people restore the Trinity River."

Before the Hoopa departed from Roseville to go back to the reservation, Marshall told tribal members and local activists, "I think you guys made an impact. This is our elite attack force today. If we have to come back, we'll bring the rest of the tribe, we'll bring our cousins with us!"

The Sacramento Metropolitan Utility District, one of the original litigants in the Westlands lawsuit, withdrew from the legal battle in 2003 after pressure by Indian tribes, fishermen and

environmentalists. Three members of NCPA - Palo Alto, Alameda and Port of Oakland - have also voted to withhold funding for the agency's lawsuit.

The event was held in Roseville not only because the NCPA office is located there, but because the city of Roseville is a NCPA member that is still a partner to the lawsuit.

"We want to return home, in peace, to the heart of our valley by the Trinity River, concluded Marshall. " We want to care for the gift of our ancestors and conserve it for our descendants. All of the money and time spent fighting in court subtracts from the real need - saving the river and the fish."

Hopefully, the NCPA and its member agencies will see the error of their ways and pull out of the litigation just like SMUD, Palo Alto, Alameda and the Port of Oakland did - after they were educated about how their participation was stopping salmon and steelhead restoration efforts on the Trinity.

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